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Dental Care Information Sheet

Why does my horse need his teeth rasping?

Horses rely entirely on their cheek teeth to grind grass and hay into a form in which it can be absorbed and used by the body. Unlike us, they cannot survive on a normal diet without effective teeth. Horses teeth constantly erupt throughout their lives and they gradually wear down with chewing. The upper teeth are wider apart than their lower ones so the wear is not always even and the upper teeth tend to become sharp on the outside edge while the lower ones become sharp on the inside. Any problems with the position of the teeth can lead to abnormal wear which can cause long term problems. Displaced teeth may cause impaction of food material leading to gum disease, tooth decay and eventually loss of teeth. These problems may be prevented by appropriate dental treatment.

How often is rasping required?

Most horses with normal dentition will require rasping about once a year but if they have any dental problems, rasping every 4-6 months may be required. We are all in favour of frequent dental checks and it is wise to have your horses teeth checked twice a year if possible. It is unlikely that treatment will be required at every check but it is sensible to monitor changes and deal with any abnormalities before they become a problem.

Is it best to use a dentist or a vet?

Horse dentists are only legally allowed to carry out simple routine rasping and are not permitted to remove large overgrowths on teeth, extract teeth (including wolf teeth) and use any motorised equipment. We find that some horses become stressed or upset with rasping and in these cases, sedation is advisable. Only vets are allowed to administer intravenous sedation. With these points in mind, we feel that vets are able to provide a better all round service for your horse's teeth but if you do decide to use a dentist, make sure they are a registered EDT (Equine Dental Technician) and fully insured.

Does tooth rasping hurt?

Providing it is done properly, rasping is not a painful procedure but some horses resent being restrained for rasping and feel uncomfortable with a rasp in their mouth. In these cases, we can offer appropriate sedation and / or analgesia to make the whole procedure as stress free as possible for your horse

How much does it cost?

We offer simple routine rasping from £15.75 + VAT while full dental treatment including use of motorised equipment costs from £33.60 + VAT. This is equivalent to (and in some cases less than) charges made by most qualified Equine Dental Technicians.

How do wild horses cope without any dental care?

One of the main reasons why modern horses require extra dental care is because of domestication. We continue to breed from horses with poor dentition which may not have survived in the wild. We also tend to feed more cereals and less fibre than horses would naturally eat in the wild and this affects the way their teeth grow and wear. It is likely that many wild horses would live longer if their teeth were attended to every year.

Will Rasping have any effect on ridden work?

Horses with sharp edges on their teeth are more likely to be uncomfortable with a bit in their mouth, particularly if they are being asked to hold their head in an unnatural position during ridden work. Dental problems can exhibit themselves in a variety of ways such as head shaking, reluctance to go onto the bit, lack of response to the bit, abnormal head carriage, and misbehaviour when ridden. Rounding off of the front cheek teeth ("Bit seating") sometimes gives the rider more control and can make certain horses more responsive to the bit. If your horse is showing any of the above problems a dental check is worthwhile.

What Age Do Horses Need to Start Having Tooth Rasps?

Young horses are change from temporary teeth to permanent teeth from 1 – 5 years old. It is important that their dentition is checked at least once a year to ensure the eruption of permanent teeth happens normally and to check for the presence of wolf teeth. Unless causing a problem, temporary teeth do not usually need rasping so most horses will not need rasping until they are 4-5 years old.